

Clifton Town Hall  
Clifton Townsite  
Park Avenue  
Clifton  
Greenlee County  
Arizona

HABS No. AZ-190

HABS  
ARIZ  
6-CLIFT,  
35-

**PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Western Region  
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# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## CLIFTON TOWN HALL

HABS No. AZ-190

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### Location:

Clifton Townsite, Park Avenue, Clifton, Grant County, Arizona

### Significance:

The Clifton Town Hall is significant as the center of Clifton town government from 1920 to 1979. Its construction represents the culmination of aspirations by Clifton residents for a building which would correspond to their high hopes for the town. Planned during the height of the World War I copper market, the building was completed just one year before the post-war depression and sale of the Arizona Copper Company. The building is also significant as an excellent example of a Neoclassical style government building. It was designed by Duncan McNeil, a prominent local architect associated with the Arizona Copper Company.

### Description:

Clifton Town Hall is located within a small business district along Park Avenue looking out over the San Francisco River. The river, which runs from northwest to southeast at this point, is fronted by a small community park behind which Park Avenue parallels the river. The buildings along Park Avenue face the river and are thus oriented to the southwest with their backs to a steeply sloping hillside. On the corner near the south end of this small business district sits Clifton Town Hall.

The Town Hall has an irregular plan and flat roof. The building's facade was designed in the Neoclassical style, typical of civic architecture of the period. The facade is composed of two symmetrical bays, one with a large window, another with a set of bi-folding garage doors. The bays are each defined by pilasters and are separated by a central entry. The pilasters of each bay support a large architrave and frieze, above which the pilasters continue up to the cornice line. Above the cornice at each bay the parapet forms pediments. Above the main entry, a sign reads "TOWN HALL". The facade treatment continues around the northwest and southeast sides of the building with a bay on each side similar to those at the southwest front. The wall then steps back and becomes smooth and relatively featureless away from the street. The decorated front of the building sits on a concrete base and is constructed of tan colored brick with decorative features of cast concrete and pressed metal. Exterior windows are wood, double-hung, with a one-over-one pattern. Most have been damaged by floods or vandalism. To the rear, the building is constructed of stuccoed brick. The roof is flat and constructed of wood trusses.

Although the building originally measured approximately 49 feet by 50 feet, three additions extended the building to its present 78 feet by 69 feet. The earliest addition was to the rear of the fire truck garage and was made of stuccoed brick. A later addition was made to the back of this to house pressure tanks for an alarm system. This and a large garage addition to the southeast side are built of local stone.

The interior is divided into an administrative side and a fire station side, connected by a hallway. The administrative side, to the northwest, is divided into five rooms and a hallway surrounding two vaults. Below the office in the north corner is a basement, accessed by exterior concrete stairs.

wrapping around the north corner of the building. The fire station side consists of a large room with a concrete floor extending the full length of the building and ramping nearly half its length down to the street. The stone additions are to the rear and side of this area.

Many interior finishes and features are intact. Walls are plaster on wood lath. The floors were originally of finished hardwood over wood framing, except for the vaults and the fire station which have concrete floors. The ceilings are plaster on wood lath, matching the walls, except for the main room of the fire station which features pressed metal panels. Interior trim includes baseboards, picture rails, and door and window casings, all of which were stained brown but have not been painted.

The only major changes to the original layout of the interior are the widening of the archway in the fire station area to create a large, open room extending into the early addition to the rear. The stone additions housing the carport and the pressure tanks are additions that service the fire station.

The building has been abandoned since a major flood in 1982. Although no major structural damage is evident, finishes and floor sustained a considerable amount of flood damage. The basement is partially filled with silt, having apparently been left infilled for several years prior to the most recent flood. Work has recently been performed to excavate most of the basement and the exterior stair.

#### History:

The first glimmer of an idea for the incorporation of the Town of Clifton began in December of 1902. Clifton boosters complained about the sanitary conditions of the town and argued that incorporation would provide a means to solve the problem. Clifton at the turn of the century was a rapidly growing community. Profits for the Arizona Copper Company were up, a standard gauge rail line had just been completed to the town, and many new residents placed a burden on the limited infrastructure of the community. By April of 1903, town boosters began to circulate a petition for presentation to the Graham County Board of Supervisors to ask for incorporation of the town. In May of 1903 the County Board of Supervisors considered the idea but rejected it. Strong opposition from the Arizona Copper Company which feared additional taxation associated with corporate status for the town caused the defeat.<sup>1</sup>

Undaunted but somewhat taken aback, incorporation boosters waited five years before trying again. In April of 1908 citizens once again began to discuss incorporation for Clifton. This time they marshaled their support a bit more carefully and by February of 1909 had persuaded the Graham County Board of Supervisors to set an election date for March 20, 1909, to vote the incorporation question up or down. Boosters argued that incorporation would result in better representation for the residents of Clifton. Taxes and revenues would be collected and expended in the town limits, instead of being used by the county for areas outside Clifton. A second argument concerned the creation of Greenlee County, which Clifton residents were also lobbying for. An unincorporated town could not be selected as the county seat for the new county. Incorporation would allow Clifton to be selected as the county seat for Greenlee County. On March 20, 1909, 131 Clifton residents cast ballots. Of these, ninety supported incorporation while forty opposed it (one ballot was thrown out). The county then sat an election for town officers on June 5. On that date George Fraser beat Archie Morrison for Mayor of Clifton. Council members elected were C.P. Dunn, G. A.

Franz, C.O. Billingsly, and Henry Hill.<sup>2</sup>

Town officials first located their offices in the Central Hotel (see HABS No. AZ-188), but a campaign soon surfaced for the erection of a town hall. The construction of the Greenlee County Courthouse, started in January of 1911, may have served as an incentive to Clifton town officials who desired a suitable edifice for their own level of government. In February of 1912 a movement began for the erection of a Clifton town hall. By September of 1913, the City Council determined to build a town hall and directed council member Peter Riley to confer with officials of the Arizona Copper Company for a location. Copper Company officials, who were not avid supporters of incorporation because of its associated increase in taxation, failed to give a green light to the proposal. By November of 1913, the Town Council abandoned the idea of building a town hall.<sup>3</sup>

Council members tried again in June of 1914, by sending a delegation to confer with A.C. Company manager Norman Carmichael, but found no support for their idea of constructing a town hall. The start of World War I kept Clifton residents busy for the next few years and citizens found little time to think about items such as a town hall. Still, the expansion associated with the war effort, and increased duties of municipal government, rendered the offices in the Central Hotel somewhat less than desirable. In a stormy council session in May of 1917, the Town Council decided to move its office to the Spezie Building in Chase Creek. Officials cited a lack of space as the reason for the move. One year later, after residents complained that the Town Hall should be in a more central location, on October 29, 1918, the Town Council decided to move back to the Central Hotel and authorized the rental of a room from Mrs. Julie Pitt for a period of one year.<sup>4</sup>

Town officials saw the situation as increasingly intolerable, faced with a continuing expense for office space and a yearly decision about renewing their lease. The Town Council decided to ask voters to authorize the use of unexpended bond money left over from the bridge construction bond issue (see HABS No. AZ-179) to construct a town hall. On December 20, 1918, the Council issued a notice of election to be held in January. Voters defeated this quick fix by a margin of 146 against and 122 in favor.<sup>5</sup>

Town officials received a political lesson in their defeat and soon returned with a proposal that demonstrated they had learned it well. On February 10, 1919, the Town Council authorized a bond election to be held on March 29. This time officials asked the voters for \$179,000 for four proposals: a \$5,000 bridge at Chase Creek and the Metcalf Road, \$9,000 for bridge removal and east side improvements, \$15,000 for a town hall and fire house, and \$150,000 for a new sewer system. By linking the town hall to a series of desired improvements, town officials hoped that the voters would support the entire package even if they objected to a single part of it such as the town hall. Because the election involved a bond issue, only taxpayers could vote. The strategy paid off, although the results were close: 105 votes in favor and 101 votes opposed. Clifton would have a town hall and fire station.<sup>6</sup>

The next step for the Council was to advertise for bids on the sale of the bonds and to select an architect for the building. The Council set July 1 as the due date for purchase proposals for the bonds and advertised for an architect to design the building. On June 12, 1919, the Town Council selected Clifton architect Duncan McNeil to design the building. McNeil won the award over the El Paso architecture firm of Trost and Trost, although both firms had the same fee. On July 1 the Council accepted the bid of Chicago bonding company Powell, Gerard & Company for the sale of the bonds. The Council also selected a location on the east side for the Town Hall at the same meeting.<sup>7</sup>

On August 22, 1919, the Council formally accepted the plans and specifications drafted by McNeil and also accepted the offer of a lot by the A.C. Company. By this time the copper market had declined and the Company saw little need for continued opposition to the town hall project. The Council also authorized an advertisement for construction bids on the project based on McNeil's plans. The construction bids were opened on September 22 and referred to Town Engineer A.J. Kerr and architect McNeil for checking. Careful checking was needed since only one bid had been delivered. One week later, on September 29, 1919, the Council accepted the bid of Clifton contractor R.S. Black in the amount of \$13,813 to construct the Town Hall.<sup>8</sup>

Included in the bond issue was a clearance project for the east side across Park Avenue (formerly Conglomerate Avenue) from the Town Hall location. By the end of August in 1919 crews began to demolish and remove the remnants of Clifton's old "Chinatown" and saloon district along the banks of the San Francisco River. Many of these buildings had been vacant since the advent of prohibition in 1915 and had been badly damaged by the flood of January 1916. Buildings which had once housed such diversions as the Tip Top, The Blue Goose, El Moro, and Richilieu saloons, and the Morenci Kid Restaurant, were removed to make way for automobile parking and a riverside park.<sup>9</sup>

Across the street at the new Town Hall location, a large number of men and teams were busy removing the old adobe restaurant building which stood on the site and excavating for the new Town Hall. Excavations reached their height by the middle of October in 1919 and contractor R.S. Black estimated that he would have the job completed in two months. Contractor Black's estimate proved to be off by about four months, but by December of 1919 construction had reached a point where the local newspaper trumpeted that Clifton was indeed the metropolis of Greenlee County. The new Town Hall would be modern and up-to-date, with offices for all town officials, a town council chamber, a municipal court, a fire house, and a jail. When Black finally finished the building in April of 1920, the Copper Era reported that the "Clifton Town Hall is the finest in the State." In May, as a finishing touch, the Town Council accepted the donation of a flag for the Town Hall from the Clifton Women's Club.<sup>10</sup>

By December of 1920 the volunteer fire department had moved into their portion of the building and were awaiting the delivery of a new American LaFrance fire engine. In 1921, the Town Council installed a complete children's playground in the park across the street in front of the Town Hall. Town Engineer A.J. Kerr installed an electric fire siren atop the roof of the Town Hall in 1922. Town officials blew the siren at 7:30 a.m., noon, 5:30, and 9 p.m. in the absence of the machine shop whistle at the Copper Company (closed by the post-war depression). When a fire damaged the siren in 1926, Clifton residents could not tell the time until it was repaired. The 9 p.m. whistle was particularly important as it signaled the children in the park across the street that it was time to go home.<sup>11</sup>

The Clifton Town Hall was the center of government operations for Clifton from 1920 until 1979 when some operations were moved out of the building. Over the years changes have been very minor, such as the addition of an annex to house fire equipment in the mid-forties which was placed on the south side of the building. Most of the modifications to the Town Hall were in the nature of maintenance and repair, such as the re-roofing and re-painting. The building was damaged in the October 1983 flood and has been vacant since that time.

**Sources (Endnotes):**

1. Copper Era December 11, 1902 (I, 3: 2); April 2, 1903 (I, 3: 4); May 14, 1903 (I, 3: 2).
2. Copper Era April 2, 1908 (I, 2: 1); February 11, 1909 (I, 3: 5); March 25, 1909 (I, 3: 2); May 8, 1909 (I, 3: 2); June 10, 1909 (I, 2: 1).
3. Copper Era February 2, 1912 (I, 5: 2); September 12, 1913 (I, 1: 3); November 21, 1913 (I, 5: 4); Minutes of the Town Council of Clifton November 4, 1913.
4. Copper Era May 11, 1917 (I, 4: 3); Minutes of the Town Council of Clifton June 8, 1914 and October 29, 1918.
5. Copper Era December 20, 1918 (I, 7: 6); January 17, 1919 (I, 5: 1).
6. Copper Era February 14, 1919 (I, 1: 3); February 21, 1919 (I, 1: 3); Minutes of the Town Council of Clifton February 10, 1919 end April 14, 1919.
7. Copper Era April 16, 1919 (I, 1: 2); April 25, 1919 (I, 5: 5); June 13, 1919 (I, 1: 5); Minutes of the Town Council of Clifton, April 18, 1919; June 12, 1919; and July 1, 1919.
8. Copper Era August 22, 1919 (I, 5: 2); August 29, 1919 (I, 5: 3); September 26, 1919 (I, 1: 1); October 10, 1919 (I, 3: 3-4); Minutes of the Town Council of Clifton, August 22, 1919; September 22, 1919; and September 29, 1919.
9. Copper Era August 29, 1919 (I, 5: 3).
10. Copper Era October 17, 1919 (I, 3: 2); December 19, 1919 (I, 1: 2); April 2, 1919 (I, 1: 6); Minutes of the Town Council of Clifton, May 28, 1920.
11. Copper Era December 17, 1920 (I, 5: 2); April 22, 1921 (I, 3: 3); July 7, 1922 (I, 1: 5); February 27, 1926 (I, 1: 4); April 24, 1926 (I, 5: 1).

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SKETCH FLOOR PLAN

